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PERIPHERAL MODERNISM AND REALISM IN BRITISH- PAKISTANI FICTION

Asher Ghaffar

In *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Edward Said emphasised the importance of style as:

a necessary part of the status and volume of a text [...] which for the author producing his text is the language of his career. Syntactically, style is the extended signature of a writer, his characteristic way of connecting signs [...] style is not the origin of a text, but that which the beginning of a text intends.

(1985: 254)

Since the Indo-Pakistani novelist and poet Zulfikar Ghose has spent his entire career experimenting with style, this feature can be viewed a part of his identity, which is also non-identical with it. Style connects to the labour of his art, obscured by the weave of the novel's mimetic spell. This chapter will first focus on unpacking the logic of the conceptual arrangement of Ghose's novels that resist identification with a national form, but where nation is still uncannily present. Ghose's work is then compared with Hanif Kureishi's novels, where identity predominates in the *Bildungsroman* form. Kureishi's novels can be rethought if the *Bildungsroman* is not understood to be reflective of the author's ideology, or the subjective position of the novelist in a psychological theory of writing, which is what Bart Moore-Gilbert's (2001) genre analysis amounts to. Instead, the *Bildungsroman* should be grasped as part of this broader social and historical process that internalises a series of generic problems shaped in the compositional process. These antinomies persist and are internalised by a specific genre which is their aesthetic 'repository'.

Ghose's challenging aesthetics is, of course, modernist. However, literary scholars have not understood his work through *peripheral* modernism. His non-canonical status in post-colonial studies is in part due to his experimental style, which pushes against identity and modernism. Kureishi is canonical because his style, or 'extended signature' (Said 1985: 254), is recognisable within postcolonial studies where identity, difference, and irony predominate in autobiographical forms.

Indo-Pakistani

In Ghose's autobiography, *Confessions of a Native-Alien* (1965), names not only summon political violence but also evoke the nameless and placeless. At one point in *Confessions*, Ghose recounts

that his family's decision to change their Muslim surname to a Hindu one may have prevented them from being killed in the communal violence of 1946: 'I feel certain that if four hundred million other people had a name as queer as mine, there would have been no bloodshed' (1965: 6). History leaves traces in the body, preserved as fossils that return to language with the memory of their origin as condensed, liquid fire.

In *Confessions*, Ghose refers to himself as 'Indo-Pakistani' – clearly problematic when viewed beside the geopolitical tension between India and Pakistan following the violence of Partition and the nuclear testing that has come to define the relationship since the late 1990s. Indo-Pakistani is something of a historical contradiction – a persistent, jarring memory that shapes Ghose's work. In his autobiography, the novelist metonymically links his strange circumstance to his stammering in early childhood – existing in a historical reality, language, and form that have yet to arrive. In an interview with Bruce Meyer, Ghose remarks that literature is a search for a lost place: 'Ever since having been uprooted from India, I seem to have been looking for the landscape which would relieve me from the sense of that traumatic loss' (Meyer 1991: 99).

Literature is a landscape; and Ghose's stylistic experiments represent a search for the new in given historical forms such as realism and magical realism. His work also depicts an Indo-Pakistani and Muslim subject that resists national and religious commodification through an interweaving of styles that disavows the autobiographical form. *The Triple Mirror of the Self* (1992) echoes Paul Valéry's notion that 'My worth comes from what I lack' (2000: 117). Ghose's 'real' autobiography is clearly a representation of distinct styles in *The Triple Mirror* that is simultaneously irreconcilable with autobiographical forms and the *Bildungsroman*, which predominates in postcolonial studies.

Ghose's marginality within postcolonial studies is partially due to his own vehement resistance to the categories that shape the field, particularly narrative modes and styles associated with autobiography and realism, which are often associated with national representation. According to him, minority literature is judged through a nativist lens; in opposition to this, Ghose attempts to evade the nation and its subject matter, particularly in his criticism. This modernist critique extends to the formal features of Ghose's novels.

In this respect, Ghose's late interpreter, Chelva Kanaganayakam, highlights the contradiction between realism and magical realism (or 'counterrealism') in Ghose's work, which has resulted in 'a critical dilemma' for literary theorists. In *Structures of Negation: The Writings of Zulfikar Ghose*, Kanaganayakam states:

Even in the more ambivalent Brazilian Trilogy, the fabulosity does not eclipse the colonial experience of Brazil. The critical dilemma for the reader of *Torments* and *Don Bueno* is the degree to which these novels adopt a realistic mode, a difficulty that has led to both misunderstanding and adverse criticism.

(1993: 136)

Zulfikar Ghose's peripheral modernism

For the most part, postcolonialists have abandoned modernity as a colonial relic (Lazarus 2011), or as a quaint and anachronistic return to Eurocentrism (Huggan 2001). Contrary to popular belief, Neil Lazarus suggests an affinity between literary modernism and anticolonialism:

while colonialism is commonly taken as intrinsic to the socio-historical project of modernity, modernism is not typically viewed – for all its 'dissidence' – as featuring an anticolonial dimension. On the contrary, modernism is typically viewed, for all that

it says 'no' to modernity, as a Eurocentric projection, as itself latently if not explicitly colonialist in character.

(2011: 28)

The modernist dimension in Ghose's work lends itself to Theodor Adorno's philosophical aesthetics, particularly *Aesthetic Theory* and *Notes to Literature*, where the politics of form is emphasised – challenging representational politics. Timothy Brennan (2014) has recently reinterpreted peripheral aesthetics through the Neapolitan humanist Giambattista Vico and emphasised orature, the sheer physicality of language, and the philologist's critique of irony. These peripheral aspects both draw on and push literary modernism's configuration to something unfathomed.

The Triple Mirror is a world novel narrated through magical realism, realism, and modernism, which correspond to the geopolitics of the world during the Cold War. The Suxavat section draws on magical realism. The section set in the UK shifts to a kind of stream of consciousness that evokes Ghose's *Crump's Terms* and is reminiscent of Woolf. The final, Indo-Pakistani, section is written in a realism that resembles the novelist's *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, which is set in Pakistan, and other Urdu and anglophone Pakistani (and Indian English) post-Partition novels. That is, different styles relate to distinct narrative modes that are also *national* forms that clash with one another.

The overall effect between these different styles is a dissonance within the 'unity' of the world novel. These styles are also constitutive of Ghose's 'autobiography' and his own working through formal problems. As such, *The Triple Mirror* is a mimesis of Ghose's other works, and arguably a culmination of sorts – not a grand synthesis, but a representation of aesthetic antinomies in their uncompromised form, which is distinct from the *Bildungsroman* and other autobiographical forms, where compromise is a defining feature (Moretti 2000).

In Ghose's novel, names summon political violence, while also invoking cross-religious identities that serve as a response to the religious violence of Partition. While Ghose is stridently secular, he approaches art with a religious intensity. Religious and oral elements are realism's after-effects reverberating in the novel's lyrical cauldron. The negation of the self does not affirm orature, but develops into a critical position in the formal cells of the work that is ambiguous, future-oriented, and historical.

Ghose represents familiar Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu concepts to depict the composite character of pre-Partition India. In some ways, the cross-religious style of his work echoes the short stories of the great Urdu writer Intizar Husain, who bridges Islam with Hinduism in *A Chronicle of the Peacocks: Stories of Partition, Exile and Lost Memories* (2006). While Husain's work is an important nostalgic representation of pre-Partition India, Ghose's work focuses on what is not yet (Bloch 1988). Despite not belonging to the same literary tradition, the Partition shaped both writers. They are both haunted by the same moment; and the juncture serves as a primal scene in *The Triple Mirror* whose tremors can be felt throughout Ghose's corpus.

In *The Triple Mirror*, oral culture is not a mystical antithesis of political subjects emerging out of Partition's trauma, but an absent presence that circulates in this work. Oral culture is powerful in the novel because it is unnamed. By evoking oral culture without commodifying it, Ghose preserves an important feature of peripheral aesthetics. Oral culture does not become a facile affirmation of a false universality that resolves religious tension. This absence animates as the after-effect of the realist representation of historical trauma that resists objectification.

Ghose's identification with the 'Indo-Pakistani' concept is ambiguous and does not slip into a facile cosmopolitanism that sutures memory from its visceral physicality, which is registered in densely figurative prose. 'Indo-Pakistani' always exists as a historical possibility – the intimacy of the self and the other, rather than their objectification. In his fiction, Ghose does not seem

to reconcile with a place – whether it be a specific nation or the world abstractly conceived. This differentiates him from Salman Rushdie's notion of immigration as an affirmative process of 'translation' (1991). In his study on Rushdie, Brennan highlights that exile and nationalism are two oppositions that relate to 'more traditional aesthetic conflicts: artistic iconoclasm and communal assent, the unique vision and the collective truth' (1989: 23).

In *The Triple Mirror*, this aesthetic conflict manifests in the clash between modernism and realism, which results in a uniquely peripheral modernist style. On the one hand, the writer of the contemporary world novel focuses on specific national experience, predominantly through a realism that self-consciously represents national experience. On the other hand, this conspicuous form strives to reach the global market through firmly entrenched and urbane magical realism. This aesthetic often evades the novelistic setting and tends to challenge the nation as a narrative construct.

In his attempt to evade subject matter, Ghose vehemently affirms the modernist ideology of art for art's sake. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argues that modernism is an attempt to transcend the historical; and he also saw realism as a recurrence of the nineteenth-century rationalism that did not break its spell, particularly after the rationalisation of the Holocaust. He suggested that form underlies political content, while political content or subject matter is an effect of form, or 'epiphenomenal' to it. Subject matter is important insofar as it is also developed at a formal level too.

Ghose echoes Adorno when he remarks that 'form is all there is' (personal communication, 24 August 2009). His attempt to reject subject matter in his criticism and interviews is likely a response to critics whose sole focus is reconciling subject matter and placing it within an appropriate critical paradigm. Since the novelist is unable to locate a language to link his formalist and political concerns, he often simplistically opposes them. Adorno provides the critical link to bridge form and politics and to grasp the 'truth-content' of Ghose's work – its social and political meaning – while Ghose's development of modernism requires one to rethink realism. That is, if peripheral modernism entails a disavowal of realism, must not the latter re-enter the sphere of literary and cultural criticism in a renewed form to understand its object?

For Ghose and Adorno, literary form is a central means of resisting the course of the world. As literary critics, they both analyse the universalising tendencies of theories that attempt to extrinsically grasp artwork which affirms the world as it is, rather than showing how artwork negates social reality in its form. Ghose reinforces this point in *The Art of Creating Fiction*:

What is being praised is not literature but the fact that the East European or West African is deemed worthy of warm sympathy because his body or his mind has been tortured by the rulers of his native land or because there is some other socio-political consideration that is generating universal debate or because the work briefly enchants us with some exotic myth.

(1991b: 37)

Ghose's own insistence on 'things' – the sheer necessity of style to put vigorous pressure on subject matter – rather than a false imposition of subject matter on the movement of style – draws on William Carlos Williams' modernist poetics.

Despite Ghose's somewhat predictable recoil from representational aesthetics in his vehement affirmation of art for art's sake, realism returns in his work. Ghose's work thus also develops Adorno's ideas further because in *The Triple Mirror* the narrative does not do away with realism in Part Three ('Origins of the Self') of the novel. One of the recurring images in the novel's opening section, 'The Burial of the Self', is the jaguar which, as Wilson Harris notes,

has symbolic importance in a broadly conceived Latin American and Caribbean culture (2005). This image appears in a synchronous dream of each member of the Suxavat 'tribe', suggesting a kind of muted and mythic collectivity; yet the jaguar eventually disappears in more predictable sentences: 'We lost our way. There was no jaguar' (Ghose 1992: 67). A myth that does not necessarily possess a seamless relationship with 'the people' is a retrospective gaze at the fragmentary past. Like a sinuous snake circling its tail, the magical realist form searches for its antithesis in the realism of the novel's final section.

In Ghose's work, peripheral aesthetics registers in the return of realism, which is a yearning for the lost totality of the Indian nation that is metonymically linked to his childhood and oral culture – the latter emphasises the conjunction between myth, history, and a kind of progress. Ghose's longing for the impossible crystallises into novel categories such as 'native-alien', 'Indo-Pakistani', and 'the scattered one', which reflect both disunity and unity, what is and what has not yet arrived.

The return of realism

The Triple Mirror of the Self mediates representational and modernist aesthetics, which as Fredric Jameson remarks, have returned as a central conflict in aesthetics. He remarks:

Nowhere has this 'return of the repressed' been more dramatic than in the aesthetic conflict between 'Realism' and 'Modernism,' whose navigation and renegotiation is still unavoidable for us today, even though we may feel that each position is in some sense right and yet that neither is any longer wholly acceptable.

(2002: 196)

The Triple Mirror extends modernism through an immanent critique, using the strength of its own concept, to move it forward.

The distinctive modes in Ghose's work also correspond to overlapping styles that critique one another – questioning the global commodification of magical realism and, more recently, the 'national' realist mode into 'the unfortunate feel of ready-mades' (Brennan 1997: 203). Some critics have been quick to denounce the composite character and lack of unity in Ghose's work. Brouillette more accurately understands it as a 'pastiche' of his prior works (2007). Then again, if pastiche is viewed as evidence of a loss of historicity (Jameson 1991: 25), Ghose's work cannot be seen simply as a mere mixing of modes and forms to produce a distinctive formalist experiment. Pastiche overlooks the historical dimension of style, which is one of the novel's most compelling features and not random in the logic of its conceptual arrangement.

When describing his own experience of geographical space, Ghose uses the modernist term 'montage':

There are a good many images, especially of landscapes, where there is a sort of montage effect in my mind: I've only got to look hard at the superimposed Brazilian landscape and I can see an Indian landscape showing through it.

(Ghose qtd. in Brouillette 2007: 151)

His work is a montage of styles – each of which reflects a place that correlates to a specific literary history and mode. Ghose's work straddles national forms to provide a critical phenomenology of the world. Emphasising postcolonial categories, such as pastiche, irony, and artifice, undermines the historical dimension of *The Triple Mirror* and its affective sense of loss, which

is physically registered at the level of style, particularly in the realist section. Although irony is clearly at play in the novel, particularly in the Suxavat section, it is 'epiphenomenal' to the novel's form, in Adorno's sense.

Unlike the *Bildungsroman*, which is concerned with the self's formation, Ghose's *The Triple Mirror* is also a fractured autobiography that in its stylistic movement generates a modernist twilight. Literary style is the aesthete's identity – but also presents the minority, secular Muslim self, under threat of annihilation. No style emerges uncompromised. There is no pure, disinterested narration that is held together in a single stylistic medium. Identity is disavowed and remains only as a residue of the work's movement – which can be understood in relation to the real threat of the annihilation of the stateless individual and the refugee condemned to a placeless place.

Autobiography and style come together, but Ghose represents the self as an aesthetic effect that clashes and converges with other stylistic divisions that are national in character. The movement against identity is not only a function of content, but also of Ghose's engagement with form, which is non-representational, moving away from identity like Islamic mosaic art. This creates a stylistic texture that remains unnamed, but is present as the 'embodiment' of a stylistic 'vigour' in Erich Auerbach's historical sense.

The uncanny return of realism haunts Ghose's engagement with literary modernism. This return of the repressed points to modernism's insularity which becomes open to the world and non-synchronous temporalities that interrupt it, while also dispelling Jameson's (1986) notion that the peripheral novel does not provide aesthetic enjoyment of the modernist classics. In juxtaposing the dominant modes that have come to shape the post-Cold War novel, the novelist provides a more deeply critical form for the world novel that emphasises the problem of form.

Realist dissonance

The aforementioned critical dilemma to which Kanaganayakam alludes has led to accusations that Ghose has 'always been avowedly elitist in his artistic aims' (Sanga 2003: 75). It is important to understand *The Triple Mirror's* fragmentary form as interrelated to the novel as a whole. Adorno understood the form of the fragment as opposing the idea's totality and not as the manifestation of a particular idea (1997). After all, *The Triple Mirror* is, in part, about a scholar attempting to locate the meaning of a magical realist fragment written by the world's greatest realist.

The failure to produce unity is intentional and somewhat predictable on Ghose's part; what is less expected is that the dissonance between different narrative modes and styles occurs within the 'unity' of the world novel – questioning it as a mode, style, and a chronotope. Ghose's work is a disavowal of the world novel that challenges its concepts through stylistic heterogeneity, which is the novel's historical 'braille' that requires further exploration.

Adorno understood the dissonance of form as constitutive of the work's truth-content, which is social; and thus his philosophical aesthetics mediates the false opposition between form and content in the reception of Ghose's work. Thus, for Adorno, artwork does not 'resolve objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but [...] expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure' (1997: 31).

The Triple Mirror represents a dissonant unity of unresolved styles – two of which have come to define the post-Cold War world novel: magical realism and realism. *The Triple Mirror* juxtaposes magical realist, modernist (stream of consciousness), and realist styles to dispel their individual auras, while regrouping old aesthetic categories within the forms of the time (Buck-Morss 1977) to intimate another world novel. This is precisely what makes this a far-reaching

work – more so because the work is not merely a fleeting experiment, but a mimesis of Ghose's aesthetic labour throughout his life.

In *The Historical Novel* (1962), Georg Lukács suggests that realism arose out of the experience of the French Revolution. Likewise, magical realism emerged out of a specifically Latin American colonial experience, which ended with the boom novels. Literary scholars do not often consider the worlding of styles; and yet what is most striking about Ghose's *The Triple Mirror* is the stylistic interplay in sharp juxtaposition. Putting both together speaks to two discontinuous temporalities and uneven literary processes in the world that continue to shape the contemporary world novel, while also articulating identity as an after-effect of stylistic experimentation, capturing the linguistic braille of dislocated experience: identity becomes non-identity, and it is clear that the novel is obsessed with annihilation of the self in a myriad of ways.

Said identifies the harrowing underside of global experience in the bewildering style of Palestinians dispossessed of their land and stripped of their rights. In this narrative style, Said suggests that Palestinian writers experience: 'an urgent need to reconstitute their roots, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology, or restored people' (2002: 177). Echoing Lukács, Said reiterates that the novel represents the 'transcendental homelessness' of modernity, as compared to the 'rounded totality' of the epic that reflects the Homeric world where the self is not yet differentiated from the world (1962: 29). In Said's iteration, however, the exile's 'jealousy' results from their lack of recognition as a collectivity. Ghose's distinct styles juxtapose serial and non-serial time in the shattered image of the 'whole'. Through the juxtaposition of serial and non-serial time, the novelist captures the felt sense of the tension of the Cold War and the decolonising world's appeal to represent itself.

Similarly, Jameson suggests that in developing countries representational aesthetics predominates because of 'the possibility of forgetting, or repressing, the political altogether, at least for a time; of stepping out of the "nightmare of history": into the sealed spaces of a private life' (1989: vii). In peripheral countries, this nightmare seeps into everyday life, perhaps not in the diffuse sense that Jameson suggested, but there is a clear distinction between the US and Pakistan with regard to the separation of private and public space – certainly as it manifests in the secular and religious divide.

The dizzying narrative styles and modes correspond to Ghose's forced migration to Pakistan. He captures this displacement in a counterpoint of style, which is the texture of his native-alien experience. This is reflected stylistically in the rapid movement of sentences such as when the narrator moves from Baltimore, to London, to Karachi in a single paragraph to reflect Proustian convolutions of memory:

No, this was not the last fortnight before the rainy season ended but much earlier, a decade perhaps before I arrived in the rain forest, a memory prior to experience, its images constituted by the force of a conceit while I stood in the museum in Baltimore in front of the painting of a girl in Tahiti [...] Or much earlier still [...] that moment of hallucination that possessed me as I lay in a cousin's house in Karachi after the flight from London.

(1992: 11)

Ghose's experiment is not gimmicky, as dislocated experience sediments in the novel's form and represents his *labour* with style throughout his career. Experimentation does not signal the new for Ghose, but the recurrence of prior forms that he has reorganised. In his work, magical realism and realism are presented in fragmentary form through sharp contrasts resisting the commodification (and totality) of each form – providing an after-image of the world and the

self between the Cold War and ‘the end of the age of three worlds’ (Denning 2004: 3). Even if realist plot appears to abandon itself to modernist formal concerns, the plot’s social function is still present, as it often is in Ghose’s compulsively readable novels. Hence, his major novels are both experimental and realist, preserving both a political function of plot in a Lukácsian sense of representing the socio-historical movement, in the midst of decolonisation – along with a modernist aesthetic. However, due to their juxtaposition, modernism becomes something other to itself, and the peripheries appear strange in the latter’s twilight.

Despite Ghose’s vehement rejection of realism in an essay published in *The Art of Creating Fiction* (1991b) a year prior to the publication of the novel, the mode uncannily returns in the final section of *The Triple Mirror of the Self*, published the following year after a trip to Pakistan. Realism signals the return of the repressed – the nation – which haunts Ghose’s work, particularly in its depiction of the Partition riots. Even if Ghose rejects realism in his criticism, his rejection is epiphenomenal to the formal concerns of *The Triple Mirror*. The disavowal of realism estranges modernism, realism, and magical realism and places them under critical scrutiny. In his disavowal of the world novel, Ghose provides another conceptual form for writing the nation and the world. The experimental nature of the work is one reason why Ghose could not initially find a publisher for *The Triple Mirror*, and why his work is not considered canonical in the way that Kureishi’s novels are.

Nietzsche and the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*

Kureishi’s novels are modern in their content and their critique of identity, but demotic in mode; Nietzschean in their de-individualising notion of subjectivity, but anchored to realism in the *Bildungsroman* form – the only novelistic form that Kureishi has really grappled with to date. Friedrich Nietzsche is not so much internalised in postcolonial fiction, but ‘impersonated’ (Noys 2018). In *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1991), Nietzsche functions through the hardness of Kureishi’s powerful characters’ determination to overcome all odds to reach artistic success. Kureishi’s work seems most liberating in his ironic and almost Dadaesque attack of identity politics. However, the de-individualising creativity of his characters conflicts with the *Bildungsroman*, which documents the growth and formation of an individual. In this form, Kureishi represents the self’s revolt against Thatcherism.

At the end of the Cold War, the British lost their imperial status as a nation; Thatcher offered Britain a simplistic national identity, poised between its colonial past and its diminishing role in the world. This period ‘found compensation in a cynical hedonism that found lavish outlet in the overconsumption boom of the eighties’ (Anderson 1998: 81). Many scholars saw the corresponding cultural turn as entailing a loss of even the possibility of social democracy. The ensuing vacuum caused by the demise of socialism resulted in a transition from ‘communities of political belief’ to ‘communities of being’ (Brennan 2007: 11–13).

While contemporary British multiculturalism celebrated the nation as a diverse community, it simultaneously undermined the very communities that represented the ideal of ‘diversity’ (Sivanandan 1990). Kureishi opposes both the turn to identity and Thatcherism with hedonistic individualism, bereft of a community in the process of becoming. As one of Kureishi’s characters states in *Intimacy*, ‘If Marx had been our begetter, the ideologue of the century’s first half, Freud was our new father, as we turned inwards’ (2002: 59).

Kureishi draws on hedonism to critique Thatcherism and the liberal moral order, particularly the politics of identity, but he continually returns to a literary form that is about affirming identity. This contradiction between form and content is a defining feature in Kureishi’s work. Herbert Marcuse understood hedonism as the possibility to challenge the morality of reason and

thus important to consider for any critical theory of society. However, its limitation was that ‘its happiness can be derived only by abstracting from all universality and community’ (2009: 125). In Kureishi’s novels, racial individualism is extolled at the expense of a collective social body under attack by Thatcher, who upheld thrift as virtue and famously declared that society had ended.

If the *Bildungsroman* describes how one can live fully, the *Künstlerroman* (‘Artist’s Novel’) asks how one could live a life and remain true to one’s art. Emerging out of the Romantic era, the *Künstlerroman* depicts the maturation of an artist through childhood into an autonomous subject. In his dissertation on the German *Künstlerroman*, Marcuse remarks that in the Artist’s Novel, the protagonist must overcome twoness:

The artist must overcome this twoness: he must be able to configure a type of life that can bind together what has been torn asunder, that pulls together the contradictions between spirit and sensuality, art and life, artists’ values and those of the surrounding world. This is the fundamental problem and theme of the artist novel: it generally presents us with the attempt of an artist to reconcile this dichotomy in some manner. (2007: 85)

In the opening of *The Buddha*, the protagonist declares:

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost [...] perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored.

(Kureishi 1991: 53)

In the racial Artist’s Novel, the contradiction between identity and change is complicated because of the tension between belonging and not belonging in a social world dominated by race. In *The Buddha*, Karim remarks:

Yeah, sometimes we were French, Jammie and I, and other times we went black American. The thing was, we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it.

(1991: 53)

For the mixed-race character Karim Amir, this ‘twoness’ already presupposes the objective negation of the subject, a kind of double negation that must be worked through. The double character of his mixed identity complicates the form, but does not generate a dissonant formal pressure that pushes the form in radically new directions. The excitement that begins the promising novel harkens back to the adventure novels, precursors to ‘the baroque novel of ordeal’ (Bakhtin 1986: 13–14). The adventure in ‘the odd mixture of continents and blood’ (Kureishi 1991: 3) is developed in relation to tedium that connects to religion, the past, as well as Changez’s disability, failed sexuality, and many of the female characters who are not integral to the plot movement, except as foils for the protagonist’s ascent. The facile closures of Kureishi’s novels clash with the characters’ initial doubleness.

After the Cold War, the decolonising world, the West, and the Soviet Union, became one, mass culture transformed into anticolonial resistance on the one hand, and also the remarkable weightlessness of popular culture on the other (Denning 2004). *The Buddha* links celebrity culture to resistance, and works against a long-standing concept of community where ‘black’ was non-racial and socialist (Sivanandan 1990). The performative self becomes equated with

resistance and cunning is the key to upward mobility. In *The Black Album* (2009), the narrator's encyclopaedic knowledge of pop culture becomes a literary style. Allusions to popular culture give sentences apparent weight, even if they are hollow. For example, Shahid's brother Chili 'drank only black coffee and Jack Daniel's; his suits were Boss; his underwear Calvin Klein, his actor Pacino' (Kureishi 2009: 43). Kureishi's attempt to critique identity is often sacrificed to script-like writing. This unfinished quality of *The Black Album* renders characters chess pieces in an ideological game, as though the novel is surrendering to filmic realist representation.

Discussing Haroon's gift in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Bruce Robbins alludes to the way in which irony functions in an ambivalent manner:

On the one hand, the cures are real, and [the novel] treat[s] the guru's prescribing of a curative dose of irresponsibility with at least some irony, the effect is far from ironic. There is a real if reluctant approval for the euphoric escape from over individualized responsibility.

(2009: 95)

The ambivalent function of irony affirms what it attempts to negate. Irony functions as a kind of assent to racial reification. While Robbins' reading of *The Buddha of Suburbia* situates it in the upward mobility genre of the Artist's Novel, he does not address how upward mobility is enabled through racial charisma.

Herbert Marcuse developed the Weberian concept of charisma, derived from the Christian *charism*:

This image expanded to the vision of the charismatic leader whose leadership does not need to be justified on the basis of his aims, but whose mere appearance is already his 'proof', to be accepted as an undeserved gift of grace.

(2009: 30)

While race and gender identity are expressions of exclusion in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, they are linked to charisma and the commodity form – possessing a mystical and fetishistic quality. In Kureishi's work, characters attempt to overcome the reification imposed by prevailing British ideologies attributed to Thatcherism, such as entrepreneurial individualism and the demise of the welfare state; and yet the plot's movement relies on hedonistic individualism at the expense of community.

Charisma is explored in all of Kureishi's novels through celebrity culture. In the nihilistic and masochistic figure of Charlie Hero, subculture is merged with celebrity culture: 'He had a smart head, Charlie; he learned that his success, like that of other bands, was guaranteed by his ability to insult the media' (Kureishi 1991: 153). The punk celebrity, who sports a swastika, is not unlike a populist leader such as Thatcher. When Karim wins the role of Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*, he yearns for the same mythical status as Charlie.

Race and affirmative culture

In the *Bildungsroman*, the spontaneous and youthful self encounters a cold, calculating, and rational world. The protagonist develops in relation to the world, rebelling against it, but also making compromises towards a greater integration of the particular with the universal. Lukács traces the form to the historical compromise between the bourgeoisie and aristocracy after the French Revolution which left its imprint on modern novelistic structure.

The classical *Bildungsroman*, or novel of education, with Goethe as its romantic prototype, often instructs a young person how to live life through a humanistic education. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796) was unprecedented precisely because the 'hero emerges along with the world and reflects on the historical emergence of the world itself' (Bakhtin 1986: 23). Bakhtin suggests that the post-Goethean *Bildungsroman* concentrates the idealism of a period within the consciousness of the hero against the calculating and utilitarian world. By contrast, the modern *Bildungsroman* is more often ironic and anti-humanist.

In *The Buddha*, cunning is implicit in the protagonist's ascent of the social ladder towards Nietzschean artistic freedom. Even if such charisma is parodied, Karim ultimately succumbs to it:

After seeing it work for so long, I began to perceive Charlie's charm as a method of robbing houses by persuading the owners to invite you in and take their possessions [...] it was false and manipulative and I admired it tremendously. I made notes on his techniques, for they worked.

(1991: 119)

Despite this, the protagonist progresses towards a reintegration with the social order. As Marcuse suggests in his understudied dissertation on the *Künstlerroman*, negation is implicit in the protagonist's initial decision to leave the family and community and form their identity, but resolution is frequently its outcome. The character is also irrevocably changed through his experience and reconciles with the world and its contradictions and learns the ultimate bourgeoisie lesson, compromise (Moretti 2000: 69).

Prior to the French Revolution, the protagonist was conceived in a static sense moved along by plot and history, as though by fate, but not yet a force that could transform the world (Bakhtin 1986: 22–23). According to Lukács, the central character of the historical novel is the 'maintaining individual' who is contrasted with drama's revolutionary 'world-historical individuals'. This liminal protagonist mediates between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. While historical change concentrates in the being of the 'world-historical figure' (Lukács 1962: 89–170), the social totality is reproduced in the world-maintaining individuals, and is more reflective of the class-based society that emerged following the French Revolution.

In sharp contrast to Homi Bhabha's celebration of the liminal as resistance, Said draws on Lukács' idea of 'maintaining individuals' in Kipling's *Kim*. As Said explains: 'The liminal figure helps to maintain societies, and it is this procedure that Kipling enacts in the climactic moment of the plot and the transformations of Kim's character' (1994: 141). Said's historical reading of liminality draws on Victor Turner's anthropological theories, which suggest that the liminal figure serves a mediatory function knitting together society to reproduce the totality of social relations in his being. Franco Moretti suggests that the *Bildungsroman* is the 'symbolic form of modernity' that internalises objective contradictions such as identity and change, freedom and happiness, security and metamorphosis, and so on:

When we remember that the *Bildungsroman* – the symbolic form that more than any other has portrayed and promoted modern socialization – is also the most contradictory of modern symbolic forms, we realize that in our world socialization itself consists first of all in the interiorization of contradiction. The next step being not to solve the contradiction, but rather to learn to live with it, and even transform it into a tool for survival.

(2000: 9–10)

In his new prologue to his work, Moretti reiterates the centrality of compromise in shaping this important form:

And so, in the same decades as Faust, the enormous and unconscious collective enterprise of the *Bildungsroman* bears witness to a different solution to modern culture's contradictory nature. Far less ambitious than synthesis, this other solution is compromise: which is also, not surprisingly, the novel's most celebrated theme.

(2000: 9)

In Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim becomes marketable as an artist and attains upward mobility in part due to racial charisma. When Eva sees him, she exclaims: 'Karim Amir, you are so exotic, so original!' (1991: 9). Even though this is parodied, there is a silent assent as Karim is also cast in Shadwell's play 'for authenticity and not for experience' (1991: 147). Eva becomes a mentor who teaches him that 'compliments [are] useful tools in the friendship trade' (1991: 92). In *The Black Album*, Deedee's erotic desires are shaped by Shahid's skin colour: 'I love that café-au-lait skin' (1991: 217). Racial charisma is sexualised and ultimately celebrated – even if it is parodied. In the racial *Bildungsroman*, compromise is ultimately about racial integration – a structural feature of the racial *Bildungsroman* that constitutes a contribution to the European form.

Kureishi's writing prefigures multicultural Britain, culture administered from above, rather than developed out of plebeian material from below. The novelist's treatment of the *Bildungsroman* prefigures the contemporary post-race discourse that resolves race, disguising its psychic trauma with the triumph of liberalism. Karim moves up the social ladder by his own merit, but also because of his skin colour. In the process, he becomes integrated into post-war Britain against traditional and relatively changeless and more important figures such as Jamila.

Through humour, parody, and Nietzschean masking, Kureishi's characters develop a romantic concept of art premised on sensuality to resist Thatcher's Protestant views. In Karim, race converges with charisma, despite Jamila's reminders of the racial attacks in her less affluent neighbourhood. Karim is ultimately profoundly calculating as a character, prefiguring the modern racialised artist whose skin colour and national affiliation are their wares – the means by which they enter into the marketplace. Irony serves the dual purpose in simultaneously critiquing colonialism and racism, while also reinforcing the affirmative culture it sets out to critique – particularly through individualism that converges with race and celebrity authorship in the formal cells of the *Bildungsroman*.

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